

# Clean

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## Clean by nb\_richie (shipit)

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**Summary:**

No matter what he does, Stan never feels clean

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## Author's Note:

Proceed with caution- Stan has a panic attack and there's mention of another character having one. Some of STan's actions can be seen as self-harm.

The portrayal of Stan's OCD may not be true to real life for those who suffer from it. I don't have OCD and my writing is based off of my research and what a friend of mine with OCD told me about his struggles.

Everyone seems to have moved past what happened. Other than the occasional bad day, the losers carry on like it never even happened. Stan doesn't know what to do because he can't let go. He wakes up in the middle of the night drenched in sweat, his face damp with tears. Or he'll sit in class and he swears he feels the muck of the sewers around his legs. Sometimes a bully will shove him into the mud and it's disgusting and he just wants to claw his own skin off to get rid of the feeling of dirty.

That's what he's thinking about as he stands in the shower after another long day of school. His skin is raw and red from the amount of times he's scrubbed it with first the bar of soap, then his own hands. Outside, Mike is waiting for him so they can bike to the Barrens together. He seems to quietly understand that Stan had to shower after school. At the very least, he doesn't mind.

"Stanley? You've been in there for half an hour, everything okay?" That's his mother's voice, laced with mild concern from outside the bathroom. "Your friend's waiting for you outside."

No.

"Yeah mom, almost done."

He doesn't feel clean, not yet, but he has to go. Stan reluctantly turns off the water and dries off. A clean shirt, a pair of trousers,

underwear and socks are folded neatly on top of the toilet for him, right where he left them. It feels better than the wrinkles his school clothes collected. He tucks his shirt into his pants when he puts it on, makes sure his hair is combed, and ties his shoes so that the loops and strings are all the same size. Perfect. Now Stan can make his way back outside and get back on his perfectly polished bike.

“You ready?”

*No.*

Stan nods and hops onto his bike, setting an easy pace with Mike beside him. They don’t talk- they don’t need to- but being with Mike makes Stan feel a little less alone in his struggles. Since It happened, the two of them have started hanging out together more, even when the rest of their friends haven’t been around.

As they go, Stan notes that there are holes in the knees of Stan’s jeans. Something so normal and simple shouldn’t bother him, but it does. He wants to stitch the holes up but then they won’t look right and even if he could make it look normal, why would Mike let him fix holes in his worn out jeans? It’s weird. Stan’s weird.

Soon they’re at the barrens, where everyone else is already waiting. Richie and Bill are wading in the river, while Ben directs them on what to look for in the muddy bed. Eddie and Bev lean against one of the trees together. Most of the talking is on Eddie’s part. A cigarette between her teeth, Bev nods thoughtfully along.

“We’re l-luh-looking for clay so w-we can f-f-f-f-“

“Fortify the edges of the manhole we went down,” Ben finishes. “So that it’s harder to open.”

Mike kicks off his shoes and joins Richie and Bill in the water. His fingers sift through silt and sand, clinging to him in a way that makes Stan’s fingers twitch at his sides.

“You g-gonna help us Stan?”

He doesn’t want to. There are a ton of things he would rather do than get into that dirty water in his clean clothes. Already Stan feels like

he's covered in dirt and filth that he wants gone, but getting into the mud would feel so much worse. Stan goes to stand by Bev and Eddie.

"Think I'll sit out," he says quietly, careful not to touch the tree.

Lately he's been worse than Eddie about not doing things. The only difference is that it isn't illness that makes him afraid. He watches Bev tap her cigarette so ashes fall onto her legs. Stan wants to wipe it off, but he can't. Just like he can't clean the smudges from Richie's glasses. Or wash the dirt off of Bill's hands. Or stitch the holes in Mike's jeans or fix Eddie's part or retie the laces on Ben's shoes. Everything is wrong. Messy. Imperfect. Stan's nails dig into his palms. He wants to go home where it's clean and safe and neat.

Then Richie hurls a handful of mud at Stan as the punchline to whatever stupid joke he told but Stan didn't hear. It doesn't hurt much, physically, but the mud hits his chest dead center. He shuts his eyes. Tears sting at them as his nails dig in harder. Blood pricks to the surface of his skin, spills out. More mess.

"Stan, are you okay?"

*No.*

Stan thinks it's Beverly who asks and puts a hand on his shoulder. He pulls away from her and screams not to touch him, but the only sound that comes out of his mouth is a hoarse sound of distress. The world is too much around him, too messy. It's wrong. Wrong. Bad.

"Can you hear me Stan? Nod if you can hear me."

He nods. That's Mike's voice, smooth and slow.

"Okay. Can I touch you?"

*No.*

His words still won't come, so Stan just shakes his head rapidly.

"I won't, then. Deep breath, Stan. Real slow. Copy me."

Mike takes loud, exaggerated, slow breaths. No one else is talking. All

there is to hear is Mike breathing, accompanied by the sound of running water. With every passing moment, Stan gets worse. He just can't calm down when he's so messy and disgusting.

"I'm taking him back home for a shower at mine, it's closest."

If he could talk, Stan would scream out a thank you.

"Stan, are you okay to ride your bike there?"

*No.*

Stan nods, wrenching his eyes open to look at the concerned faces of his friends. He aims his eyes at the ground in shame. Dirt from the drying mud weighs down his shirt, a harsh reminder that he's not clean. But he'll be at Mike's soon, where soon he'll be able to wash away the grime. Then he'll be okay again.

It stings to hold onto his bike's handlebars with the cuts on his hands, but Stan ignores it so he can focus on getting to Mike's without losing it. For most of the ride, he feels Mike's eyes on him, watching him closely for signs of distress. Stan wants to yell that he isn't delicate, but he knows his voice won't allow it. And he is, he's fragile despite the fact that everyone else is okay. His freak out is stupid, his nightmares are stupid, his hallucinations are stupid. He's stupid, through and through.

Getting to Mike's doesn't take long, luckily. Mike shows him to the bathroom, gives him a towel, and says he'll get him clothes after he tells his parents why he brought Stan back without warning. Stan feels bad for causing the trouble, but he decides to worry about it when he's clean.

He can't get out of his clothes and into the water fast enough. It doesn't matter that he doesn't turn the hot water on and that the cold is borderline painful on his skin. All that's important is getting clean. Stan takes a long breath. His nose fills with the scent of the decaying bodies in the sewers. Coppery blood. He chokes back a scream and forces his eyes to take in the site of the off-white bathroom.

Stan grabs the bar of soap and lathers up his hands. Everything will

be alright when he's clean. He washes once. Twice. Three times. Four. Now he's just scratching his own skin in an effort to eradicate the dirt he can't see. The pain will be worth it if stops him from being dirty.

Outside the door, Mike knocks. He has clothes. His words go unheard. Stan thinks he hears Mike the second time, but he can't be sure. All his focus is on getting clean. Mike eventually just opens the door to set down the clothes and check on Stan.

"Are you okay?" He asks quietly.

*No.*

A sob dies in Stan's mouth. His knees are weak and he starts to fall. In an effort to catch himself, he grabs at the shower curtain. It just comes down with him, tangling around his body. The shivers set in then, leaving Stan shaking badly as he cries and keeps scratching his skin.

"Stop it!" Mike scrambles to Stan and grabs his wrists in warm, calloused hands. "What're you doing? Doesn't that hurt?"

He jerks away when Mike's thumbs brush against the wounds on his palms from digging in his nails.

"Stay right here."

Mike lets go of him to reach under the bathroom sink for a little bin of first aid supplies. He reaches for disinfectant first- which Stan knows will sting. Still, he flinches when it's poured on his hands. Mike smiles at him as he wraps bandages around Stan's hands, keeping his touch light and gentle. When everything's secured, he asks Stan if he's hurt anywhere else. Stan shakes his head.

"Come out when you're dressed."

Once he's alone again, Stan fights his way out of the shower curtains and puts on Mike's clothes. They're a little big on him, but it's better than his dirty ones. Anything's better than those. He comes out as soon as he's dressed, to find Mike in the hallway, whistling to himself and drumming his fingers against his leg.

Mike smiles at him and gestures for Stan to follow. They wind up in a neat room, the only mess being an unmade bed. Mike sits on it, patting the space beside him. The mattress looks soft, and proves to be so when Stan sits on it, crossing his legs comfortably and playing with the edges of his bandages. Unlike the silence on the way to the Barrens, this is heavy and uncomfortable- practically suffocating.

“What happened?”

*Nothing.*

The first thing Stan does is shrug, but Mike gives him this sad look, one too wise for a twelve year old. He wants an answer, and they both know that he won't let his go until he has one.

Millions of thoughts flock to the forefront of Stan's mind. How disgusting he always feels, like he's covered in a stench he could never wash off. How whenever he shuts his eyes he sees all the missing- dead- kids in the sewers. How then he can smell it too, his nose clogged with rot and blood and gray water and sweat. How the nightmares plague him. How he can feel the muck still on him. How he just wants the icky feeling and the fear to leave him alone because It should be gone.

“I want it to stop, Mikey.”

“What to stop?” Mike asks. Before Stan can reply, he answers his own question. “You're still scared of It.”

Stan can't look at him. “I know it's stupid and I should just move on like the rest of you guys, but I keep- I keep remembering.”

“You think we all forgot and we're fine?”

Yes.

“No. Richie has nightmares. Bev can't use her own bathroom. Eddie barely eats. Ben cries a lot. Bill gets flashbacks. That's just what I know about. Sometimes everything hits me and I just collapse and I can't breathe and it sucks, Stan. We're not okay. And that's okay.”

This information slowly worms it's way through Stan's brain. He



pictures Richie waking up screaming. Then Beverly shaking as she looks in the mirror. Eddie's untouched lunches come to mind. Next is Ben with tears dripping down his chubby face. And Bill, with his eyes wide in fear as he looks at nothing. Last is Mike, hyperventilating on the bedroom floor Stan's looking at right now. None of the images are pleasant and part of him wishes he didn't have to know, but it feels good to not be alone in his struggle.

"It's the mess," Stan says eventually. "I've never- I can handle being scared, y'know? I just hate being dirty. Then after- after It happened, it's just so bad. I wanna stop feeling like I'll never be clean."

"Bet someday, you will."

*No.*

"I hope so."

**Author's Note:**

Catch me on tumblr @nb-richie